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OPERATIONS ANALYSIS: THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: *D.C. Robertson*

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The naval operation at the Battle for Leyte Gulf is analyzed by comparing today's concept of the operational art with the command organizations, operation plans, and operational designs of the U.S. and Japanese naval forces of 1944. The fleet actions are examined to determine the operational failures and to validate the current operational principles. The principle finding in examining the planning and execution of the U.S. and Japanese forces in the Battle for Leyte Gulf is the lack of unity of command which limited force effectiveness in command, control and communications.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
ABSTRACT.....		11
I	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II	THE PRINCIPLES OF THE OPERATIONAL ART.....	2
III	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT.....	4
IV	COMMAND AND CONTROL.....	9
V	ALLIED OPERATIONAL DESIGN.....	13
VI	JAPANESE OPERATIONAL DESIGN.....	17
VII	ANALYSIS OF FLEET ACTION.....	20
VIII	CRITIQUE OF THE OPERATION PLANS.....	22
NOTES.....		25
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		28

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS: THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The United States victory at the Battle of Leyte Gulf was the decisive victory for naval control of the western Pacific in World War II. Code named "King II", the Allied invasion of the island of Leyte in the Philippines involved Southwest Pacific and Pacific theater forces against the bulk of Japanese naval and air assets. The naval operation, conducted on 17-26 October 1944, was planned and executed without the advantage of today's operational concepts and therefore experienced shortfalls which in total, jeopardized the obtainment of the objective, the capture of Leyte.

This analysis of the Battle of Leyte Gulf will focus on the principles of the operational art with respect to the planning and execution of the naval operation by the United States and Japan. The identification of the operational failures in planning and decision making, command and control, and operational design by the U.S. and Japanese forces will validate today's operational principles for future naval operations.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE OPERATIONAL ART

The success of joint warfare operations rests upon the ability of the commander to clearly define the objective, to understand the strategic factors of his theater, to select and effectively organize his forces and to formulate a plan of operations which will achieve the objective. His goal is to

...integrate and synchronize operations in such a manner as to apply force from different dimensions to shock, disrupt, and defeat opponents.¹

In designing the correct course of action, the commander must consider the factors relevant to operations at sea and must be guided by the principles of the operational art. The significant factors which the commander must consider are

...determined by their objective, the missions stemming from them, targets of action, the degree of their defense and protection, the composition and nature of friendly arms, the need for particular kinds of support, conditions of command and control, as well as military-geographic and other features of every sea or ocean theater or military operation.²

The principles of Joint Warfare operations represent the ideal in operational art and are the keys to successful operational design. As specified in the Doctrine for Unified and Joint Operation, the principles of the operational art are:

1. Objective. Direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective.
2. Offensive. Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.
3. Mass. Concentrate combat power at the decisive place and time.
4. Economy of Force. Allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.

5. Maneuver. Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power.

6. Unity of Command. For every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander.

7. Security. Never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage.

8. Surprise. Strike opponents when they are unaware and unprepared.

9. Simplicity. Prepare clear, concise plans and orders.³

The operational factors and principles will serve as the framework for the analysis of the naval operation at the Battle for Leyte Gulf. The analysis will present discussions on the strategic environment which shaped the operation, the Allied and Japanese command and control organizations, the Allied and Japanese operational designs, and an analysis of execution of these operational plans.

CHAPTER III

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Strategic Situation. The operation to capture the island of Leyte was the culminating point of the Pacific and Southwest Pacific theater's reclamation of the Pacific. The U.S. Pacific forces, under the command of Admiral Nimitz, conducted operations along a westerly strategic axis securing the Gilbert Islands, the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, and Palau. The U.S. Southwest Pacific forces, under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, had driven his forces on a northwesterly strategic axis through New Guinea and Morotai. As ordered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the two strategic axis would intersect at Leyte, which would serve as a stepping stone for the re-occupation of the Philippines. The capture of the Philippines was the strategic objective in the theater of operations. It offered a base of operations from which the Japanese sea lines of communication could be cut, further slowing the supply of oil to Japan from the Netherlands Indies. Additionally, the Philippines offered bases and staging areas from which to strike at China, Formosa, and the Japanese mainland.¹

The Japanese response to the Allied operational momentum was to establish a defensive line running south through Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu, Nansei Shoto, Formosa, and the Philippines against which the full force of her military would be thrown to repel an Allied invasion.² Four "SHO" or "victory" operation plans were devised to promote this defense; SHO-1, the

Philippines, SHO-2, Formosa, Nansei Shoto, and the southern Kyushu area, SHO-3, Kyushu, Shikoku and Honshu, and SHO-4, the Hokaido area.³ The Japanese considered operations against the Philippines to be the most probable. In a post war interview concerning the Leyte operation, Admiral Toyoda, the Commander in Chief Japanese Combined Fleet, best expressed the strategic importance of the Philippines;

"Should we lose the Philippines, ... even though the fleet should be left, the shipping lane to the south would be completely cut off so that the fleet, if it should come back to Japanese waters, could not obtain its fuel supply. If it should remain in southern waters it could not receive supplies of ammunition and arms. There would be no sense in saving the fleet at the expense of the Philippines."⁴

Strategic Position. The advance of the allied forces toward the heart of the Japanese empire extended the allies' lines of communication and shortened those of the Japanese. In all respects, the Japanese held the central position and maintained the internal lines of operation. Operations at Leyte were within easy flying distance from her bases at Formosa and Japan, and the Japanese main base of supply was moved westward from Truk to Brunei Bay on the western side of Borneo.⁵ At the time of the Allied invasion of Leyte the Japanese fleet was dispersed to two principal locations; Lingga Roads near Singapore and Tokyo. The fleet was split to ensure that adequate fuel supplies were available to train the fleet units to execute the SHO plan. The shortage of fuel was a direct result of Allied interdiction of the sea lines of communications.⁶ In planning for the SHO defense, the Japanese hoped to use the inherent advantage of the

central position to more quickly move to the point of attack and to concentrate their forces against any Allied offensive.

To lessen the burden of external lines of operation, Third Fleet moved its principle supply base 1000 miles westward from Eniwetok to Ulithi in October of 1944, while Seventh Fleet retained its supply base at Manus.⁷ In combining the forces of the two theaters, the Allies were able to extend their basis for operation. This offered two lines of operation to the objective and compounded the Japanese problem of determining and interdicting those lines of operation.

The external position was, however, problematic with respect to the locations of supporting air bases for the Leyte operation. The nearest air base was at Morotai, nearly 540 nautical miles from the Philippines. The next closest air bases, Sansapor, Noemfoor, Biak were over 800 nautical miles from the Philippines.⁸ Given these ranges, air support for the Leyte operations had to be provided from Third Fleet's fast attack carriers, unless forward air bases could be secured. General MacArthur favored the use of land based aircraft to support the operation. This was to be accomplished by securing bases closer to the objective area and moving aircraft into a position to cover the landing force.⁹ Additionally, the lack of close airfields hampered the collection of intelligence on the operation area. Navy PB4Y-1 and Army Air Force B-24 aircraft, both with a range of 1000 miles, were necessary to adequately cover the objective area.¹⁰

Strategic Planning. The Allies and the Japanese both began planning for operations to contest the Philippines as early as the summer of 1944. In each instance, the long range plans were modified to reflect the current strategic factors. As will be discussed in chapters V and VI, the operations plans were changed to reflect the strength of the Japanese air arm.

The original Allied plan of July 1944, proposed a four phase campaign to capture the Philippines. The first phase established a foothold in southern Mindanao for air bases and to provide joint air cover with carrier air for the second phase, the assault on Leyte Island. Phases three and four provided for the occupation of Luzon and the consolidation of the Philippines. This plan was altered due to the lack of Japanese resistance to Third Fleet carrier air strikes on the central Philippines in September of 1944, which were conducted in support of operations against Palau and Morotai.¹¹ Based on Admiral Halsey's report, and corroborated by intelligence from filipino guerrillas, the Joint Chiefs of Staff eliminated the intermediate operations at Yap, Talaud, and Sarangani Bay and approved the immediate operation against Leyte.¹² This order freed critical landing craft for the operation; however the decision to conduct the operation earlier did not allow for detailed intelligence and hydrographic analysis of the island prior to D-day. Intelligence on troop strength and fortifications was provided primarily by filipino guerrillas through the Australian intelligence network. Charts of the area were predominantly pre-war vintage and

inaccurate and the recurrent poor weather over the island prevented detailed aerial photography and analysis.¹³

The Japanese drafted the SHO plans in August of 1944.¹⁴ The plans were predicated on the use of carrier air power to soften the U.S. protection of the landing force and to permit fleet action against the landing force. This capability was questionable at the time of the plan's inception due to the devastation of the Japanese carrier air capability at the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944. The objective of Admiral Ozawa's carrier fleet was to regenerate the required aircraft and trained air crews to fulfill the requirements of the SHO plan. As will be discussed in the chapter VI, the carrier air force never recovered.

CHAPTER IV

COMMAND AND CONTROL

Allied Command and Control. The command and control organization for operation King II involved the marshalling of forces from the two Pacific theaters. Leyte is geographically located within the Southwest Pacific theater of war and therefore the overall command of the operation fell to COMSOWESPAC, General MacArthur. The Pacific theater forces assigned to the operation were employed in a supporting role and remained under direct command of CINCPAC, Admiral Nimitz. This arrangement was by agreement between MacArthur and Nimitz.¹ The COMSOWESPAC naval component commander was Vice Admiral Kinkaid, who commanded all allied theater naval forces, the U.S. component of which was the Seventh Fleet. The Seventh Fleet forces were further divided for the operation into four functional groups; the Central Philippines Attack Force (CTF 77) commanded by Vice Admiral Kinkaid, the Northern Attack Force (CTF 78) commanded by Rear Admiral Barbey, the Southern Attack Force (CTF 79) commanded by Vice Admiral Wilkinson and Submarines Seventh Fleet commanded by Rear Admiral Christie.² The Southern and Northern Attack Forces comprised the amphibious shipping necessary to land the Sixth Army ashore on Leyte.

The Pacific Ocean Area naval force contribution to the operation was the Western Pacific Task Force, commanded by Admiral Halsey. The principle naval arm of the task force was the First Carrier Task Force (CTF 38) commanded by Vice Admiral

Mitscher.³

The U.S. command structure for King II did not provide for unity of operational command, although unity of effort was expected through inter-staff and inter-commander communication. The formalized agreement on theater forces operating outside their respective theaters pushed coordination responsibility to the JCS or Combined Chiefs of Staff as was appropriate.⁴ Further, COMSOWESPAC did not appoint a Joint Task Force Commander as was the prescribed procedure for joint Army and Navy operations. General MacArthur, ineligible as a Supreme Commander to designate himself as the JTFC over allied forces, elevated the Commander, Sixth Army as the land component commander along with the existing naval and air component commanders, retaining direct oversight for the operation. Additionally, Admiral Kinkaid designated himself commander for the Central Philippines Attack Force, assuming the burden of three command levels, Supreme Naval commander, Commander Seventh Fleet, and Commander Central Philippines Attack Force.⁵

Operational planning for the Leyte operation was coordinated through the Commander, Sixth Army and was a product of the Allied Air and Naval Commanders and the Commander Sixth Army.⁶ Oversight for the operation plan was performed by General MacArthur who consolidated this work into Operation Plan 70. Planning coordination between COMSOWESPAC and CINCPAC was accomplished between the CINCPAC Plans officer and the COMSOWESPAC Chief of Staff, although Admiral Nimitz further

specified that detailed coordination should be arranged between commanders.⁷

Japanese Command and Control. The Japanese naval forces, under the command of Admiral Toyoda, Commander in Chief Combined Fleet, was reorganized during the summer of 1944 to account for the devastation of the carrier assets brought about by the Battle for the Philippine Sea. Admiral Toyoda's SHO-1 force consisted of a Mobile Force divided into a Main Body (Northern Force), commanded by Vice Admiral Ozawa and the First Striking Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Kurita. The First Striking Force was further divided into the "A" Force (Center Force) and Force "C" (Van of the Southern Force). Additionally, units of the Second Striking Force were assigned to Force "C".⁸ The Main Body included the remainder of the Japanese carrier assets and was stationed in Tokyo to affect repairs to the carriers and to revitalize the pilot force, while forces "A" and "C" consisted of the Japanese surface action vessels and were stationed at Lingga Anchorage near Singapore to maintain access to their fuel stores.⁹ An additional element of the SHO-1 forces was the Advance Force which was comprised of 16 submarines under the command of Vice Admiral Mikawa.¹⁰

The Japanese command organization did not achieve unity of command for the SHO operation. Although nominally in command of the operation, Admiral Toyoda's headquarters remained in Tokyo. Upon execution of the SHO-1 plan, each force commander operated independently to achieve his task in the operation. While

decentralized execution is desired, the complexity and interdependency of the SHO plan components required the operational commander to communicate freely with his commanders. The unreliability and difficulty of high frequency, long range communications did not permit coordination of the operation from such a distance. In this respect, the command organization allowed no flexibility in the SHO plan execution.

Another significant shortcoming of the operations command organization was inherent to the structure of the Japanese Imperial Command. Coordination between land and naval forces were difficult because the military organization provided for no unified commands.¹¹ This limitation was exacerbated by the lack of carrier air forces to support the SHO operation. Efforts to coordinate the use of Army Air Force aircraft to support the SHO plan were first presented to the Army on 18 October, three days prior to the deployment day of the First Striking Force. As remarked by Army Colonel Takushiro Hattori;

In an operation in which land, surface, and air power are uniting as one to conduct decisive battle, the fact that the Army General Staff knows nothing of Combined Fleet's operational movements is deplorable, and will be the point of greatest criticism in the study of the SHO operation by future historians.¹²

CHAPTER V

ALLIED OPERATIONAL DESIGN

Intelligence Estimate. Due to the JCS decision to conduct the Leyte operation earlier than originally planned, the operational intelligence available was not as detailed as could be hoped. COMSOWESPAC Allied Naval Commander's intelligence estimate, as determined on 26 September and updated on 16 October, believed that the Japanese would not offer a major fleet action opposition to the landing at Leyte; he estimated that the Japanese air forces were handicapped due to the U.S. air strikes against the Philippines and Dutch East Indies airfields and fuel dumps; and he expected no reinforcement of air strength and no carrier based air attacks.¹ However, the estimate concluded that the possible threats to the Allied invasion force still included a strong cruiser-destroyer task force, submarines, and motor torpedo boats. Of the 15 airfields on Leyte, only eight remained operational and the strength of the Japanese air power in the Philippines was estimated at 442 fighters and 337 bombers.²

Operational Design. The operational objective of King II was the capture of Leyte. Specifically, the naval forces were to "seize control of the Leyte Gulf-Surigao Strait area and establish major air, naval, and logistical bases for the support of subsequent operations to reoccupy the Philippines."³ Given the above intelligence estimate, the following planning assumptions were made:

1. Allied forces would be established along the line of the islands of the Marianas, Ulithi, Palau, and Morotai.
2. Japanese land and air forces would be significantly reduced.
3. The Japanese fleet would not challenge the invasion force in strength.
4. Only light infantry forces remain in the Philippines.⁴

The concept of Allied operations was to conduct an amphibious landing supported by carrier aircraft and naval surface forces in the objective area. Principally, the naval forces of COMSOWESPAC were to directly support this operation and the naval forces of CINCPAC were to provide strategic cover and associated support. The COMSOWESPAC Operation Plan 70 directed Admiral Kinkaid and the Seventh Fleet to

1. Transport and establish the landing forces ashore.
2. Support the operation using carrier air forces to protect convoys and provide close air support, providing for reinforcement and supply, preventing Japanese reinforcement from the sea, opening the Surigao Straits for Allied use and providing submarine reconnaissance.⁵

CINCPAC forces were to function in an associated support role. This cover and support mission entailed the use of Third Fleet's carrier air power to soften the Japanese land based air facilities and reduce the land based aircraft strength. Specifically, Admiral Nimitz's Operation Plan 8-44 specified the following tasks for Third Fleet:

1. Conduct carrier aircraft strikes against Okinawa, Formosa and northern Leyte Gulf on 10-13 October and the Bicol peninsula, Leyte, Cebu, and Negros on 16-20 October. Further, carrier air power was to be used to support the landing forces on 20 October.

2. Operate in "strategic support" of the KING II operation by "destroying enemy naval and air forces threatening the Philippines area, on or after 21 October.

3. "In case opportunity for destruction of major portion of the enemy fleet is offered or can be created, such destruction becomes the primary task."⁶

From these mission statements the design for the Allied naval action is clear. Seventh Fleet forces were to operate in the Amphibious Objective Area and protect the southern approaches to the Amphibious Operating Area, the Surigao Straits. Third Fleet's role was to supply the principle aviation striking force and operate in protection of the objective area. Third Fleet's role was critical, as forward air bases could not be established due to the accelerated timetable for the Leyte operation. As intelligence on Japanese naval force movements became clear, this protective role became the covering of the northern approaches to the objective area, the San Bernardino Straits.

The forces of Seventh Fleet and Third Fleet were synchronized in four phases to assemble the required mass for the naval operation. Phase one was Third Fleet preliminary air strikes to destroy enemy aircraft and shipping. Phase two provided for the preparation of the approaches to assault area; the 6th Ranger Infantry Battalion was to secure the islands along the approaches to Leyte Gulf and minesweeping operations were conducted in the assault craft approaches to Leyte. Phase three detailed landing zone preparation with Naval Gunfire Support from the Fire Support Units. And finally the assault and landing of

troops in phase four on October 20.

The third specification in CINCPOA's operation order is the most contentious of Third Fleet's missions for it conflicts with the general requirement to cover and support the Seventh Fleet and the specific role of covering the San Bernardino Straits. Additionally, there were no requirements in either operation order to obtain COMSOWESPAC concurrence on a decision by Admiral Halsey to pursue this contrary mission.⁷ As will be shown, Third Fleet's aggressive prosecution of this objective played into the hand of the Japanese strategy, leaving the amphibious forces and a small covering force without their designed support.

The contrary missions of the Third Fleet strike at the heart of the operational design. The participation of Admiral Halsey's fast carrier force was critical for air superiority until such time as air bases could be established on Leyte. In this case, the objective is not clear and the remaining operational principles are jeopardized in the operational design. Specifically, the ability to achieve the required mass may be nullified, the principles of economy of force and security are violated, and the enemy may achieve the element of surprise.

CHAPTER VI

JAPANESE OPERATIONAL DESIGN

Operational Design. The strategic objective of the Japanese was the defense of the homeland. As discussed earlier, the SHO-1 plan directed the defense of the Philippines, which was the operational level objective. The original SHO plan was conceived in August 1944 and stipulated the following elements:

1. Detect invasion forces at maximum range by land based aircraft searches. Determine the objective of the landing force to permit the positioning of defensive forces.

2. The First Striking Force, stationed in Brunei, North Borneo, should interdict the invasion forces before troops can be disembarked.

3. If the landing force cannot be interdicted, the First Striking Force should destroy the transports at anchor within two days of the landing.

4. The First and Second Air Fleets will conduct preparatory air strikes against the U.S. carrier forces. Within two days of First Striking Force arrival, conduct all out attack against the carrier force to allow the First Striking force to engage.

The plan, as envisioned in August of 1944, required timely intelligence to seize the offensive from the Allies. It also relied on operating along internal lines of operation, to concentrated forces quickly to counter any Allied offensive. Synchronization of surface forces and carrier air power was necessary to achieve the mass to repel the invasion. Finally, the center of gravity for the plan is the fast attack carriers of the Third Fleet.

In contrast to the intent of the original SHO plan, timely intelligence was never received. The first clear indication of

the invasion of Leyte came on 17 October, when U.S. minesweepers were detected in the vicinity of the island. The location of the invasion was not announced by the Combined fleet headquarters until 18 October.² This eliminated the possibility of interdicting the landing force, therefore the offensive was lost. Additionally, the rearming and training of the Japanese carrier air crews was not complete, necessitating a change to the operational design of the SHO plan.

The revised concept of the Japanese defense of the Philippines used several distinct naval task groups, eliminated the friendly air cover of the First and Second Air Fleets and required extensive coordination and reporting. Simply put, the Main Body or Northern Force was transit south from the Empire as a diversion to lure the Third Fleet from its covering role for the amphibious landing at Leyte. Force "A", the Central Force, was to transit through the San Bernardino Straits and a concurrent combined force of the Second Striking Force and Force "C", the Southern Force, was to transit the Surigao Strait forming a pincer on the amphibious and fire support forces at Leyte.³ Further, the Advance Force, totaling 11 submarines, were to intercept the allied invasion force along a line running from the San Bernardino Straits to a point east of Davao in Mindanao.⁴ This plan required extensive coordination between the three forces to ensure the deception plan was taken and to ensure that the required concentration of force was achieved at Leyte Gulf.

The lack of timely intelligence notwithstanding, the most

significant factor for Japanese operational planners was carrier air wing readiness. As dictated by the serious losses sustained to carrier aviation in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the Main Body was used as a diversion force. The decision to use surface action units as the principle striking force was consistent with current Japanese naval capabilities. The Japanese plan, as executed on 18 October, relied on maneuver for its success. Additionally, the Japanese hoped to use deception to lure the U.S. to commit the critical component of its operation plan in a secondary effort. However, it remains unclear as to the endstate which Admiral Toyoda wished to achieve if the pincer movement against the Allied invasion force was successful. The lack of a potent naval air arm and a land based air force unable to fill this vacuum left the question of how to defeat the striking force of the Third Fleet. Admiral Morison suggests the Japanese had hoped that the damage inflicted in the battle for Leyte would be decisive and force Admiral Nimitz to withdraw the Third Fleet.⁵ It does seem clear that for the Japanese the center of gravity of the Allied naval forces was Third Fleet, principally the fast attack carriers, although no clear method was planned to combat this force.

CHAPTER VII

ANALYSIS OF FLEET ACTION

Fleet Action. Five principle naval actions comprised the Leyte operation from 17-26 October 1944. Selected events from these battles serve to illustrate the successes and failures of the aforementioned planning and operational design. The principle naval actions were:

1. Palawan Passage. This engagement offered the first intelligence on Japanese movement and involved the engagement of Admiral Kurita's force by the submarines DARTER and DACE. (23 October)
2. Sibuyan Sea. This action was the Third Fleet's carrier air strikes against Admiral Kurita's Force "A". (24 October)
3. Surigao Straits. The Seventh Fleet's engagement of Admiral Nishimura's and Admiral Shima's Force "C" and the Second Striking Force. (24-25 October)
4. Cape Engano. Third Fleet's carrier air strikes against Admiral Ozawa's Main Body as it conducted the deception role in the SHO-1 plan. (25 October)
5. Samar. The naval engagement between Admiral Kurita's force and Seventh Fleet's escort carriers commanded by Admiral Sprague. (25 October)

The above battles are listed in chronological order, although Admiral Halsey's action off Cape Engano and Admiral Sprague's engagement of the Center Force off Samar were nearly simultaneous.

Analysis of Fleet Action. Several facts become clear from the chronology. First, the Japanese plan to form a simultaneous pincer movement against the amphibious and covering forces at Leyte could never be realized due the superior strength of the Seventh Fleet units in the Surigao Straits and due to the

superior air power of the Third Fleet. The results of the battle of the Surigao Straits was exacerbated by the lack of coordination between the "C" Force and the units of the Second Striking Fleet.

Second, the Japanese deception plan to lure Halsey's carriers away from the Japanese striking forces was successful. The deception group was not detected as early in the operation as Ozawa had planned, which Ozawa believed would be by submarine reconnaissance, but rather by Third Fleet reconnaissance aircraft. The deception was not taken until after Halsey had delayed and damaged Kurita's Center Force in the Sibuyan Sea.

Third, the success of Seventh Fleet submarine reconnaissance and the lack of success of the Japanese submarine reconnaissance is apparent. The initial engagement and reporting of Admiral Kurita's force fulfilled its operational mission by enabling Halsey to engage the Center Force in the Sibuyan Sea. The Japanese Advance Force failed to influence the Allied invasion with only 1 sinking to their credit, the destroyer escort EVERSOLE.¹

CHAPTER VIII

CRITIQUE OF THE OPERATION PLANS

Critique of the U.S. OPLAN. The principle failure of the U.S. operation plans was the command organization. The lack of unity of command ultimately threatened the successful outcome of the operation by permitting actions not in concert with the primary operational objective, the capture of Leyte. Admiral Halsey's decision to pursue an engagement with Admiral Ozawa's Northern Force unnecessarily exposed the operation to failure. Certainly CINCPAC's Operation Plan 8-44 and the overestimation of battle damage to the Central Force during the battle of the Sibuyan Sea influenced Admiral Halsey's decision, however a single Joint Task Force Commander may have seen the operation's overall status differently and in light of the inquiries of Rear Admiral Bogan (CTG 38.2), Vice Admiral Lee (CTF 34), and Admiral Kinkaid as to the advisability of CTF 38's movement north.¹ Further, had Admiral Halsey's request to prosecute the Northern Force been denied by the JTFC, the complete destruction of the Center Force may have been realized. Unity of command became the key to the obtainment of the other operational principles. The lack of unity of command allowed objectives to be unclear, permitted critical forces to be committed on secondary objectives, and permitted the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage.

Critique of the Japanese OPLAN. The failure of the Japanese SHO-1 plan is rooted in its operational idea. While the command structure of the Combined Fleet was unified under Admiral Toyoda,

the difficulty in achieving the required coordination was insurmountable given the superior U.S. fleet. The SHO-1 plan required four separate forces to be successful to repel the invasion of Leyte. The Northern Force deception needed to be taken, the Center and Southern Forces needed to join the battle at Leyte Gulf to achieve the required concentration of force and the land based air forces needed to fill the gap left by the decimated naval aviation forces. The only element of this plan that was successful was the deception plan and that success was achieved too late. Further, the failure of Admiral Ozawa to communicate the success of the deception plan to the Center Force influenced the withdrawal of Admiral Kurita's forces before a decisive conclusion was reached. During an interview in 1947, Admiral Kurita explained that his decision to withdraw from battle off Samar was influenced by radio intercepts "which led him to believe that powerful aid was on the way for the force that he was attacking."² Not knowing the location of Admiral Halsey's forces, Admiral Kurita chose to withdraw.

The SHO plan, as designed, was never able to seize the offensive from the Allied forces. Because of strategic factors, the critical mass required to repel the invasion could not be concentrated. The Japanese were successful in obtaining the element of surprise, however they were unable to capitalize on the brief advantage it afforded them. Central to this discussion is the Japanese perception of the U.S. center of gravity. No method appeared in the operation plan to defeat the fast carrier

force of the Third Fleet, which I believe was the critical factor for Japanese success.

Conclusion. It may be argued that the above listed deficiencies in the U.S. and Japanese operation plans had little impact on the inevitability of success of the invasion force and naval action at Leyte. Certainly, the momentum was with the U.S. forces and the Japanese fleet was at a reduced operating capability. Further, Admiral Ozawa expected "the complete destruction of my fleet" during the course of the SHO-1 defense.³

However inevitable the outcome, the validity of the operational principles is supported by the naval operations at Leyte. The importance of unity of command is apparent in the the command and control difficulties experienced by both sides, and in the conflicting missions given to the Third Fleet. The ability to seize the offensive, concentrate the mass required for decisive fleet action, and maneuver forces to place the enemy at a disadvantage were capably demonstrated by the U.S. in the fleet actions in the Surigao Straits and the Sibuyan Sea. As a counterpoise to the U.S. tactical successes, the Japanese achieved surprise and negated the principle of security for the Seventh Fleet units in the Battle off Samar. Finally, through a successful deception, the Japanese enticed the Third Fleet to commit its forces to a secondary effort in the fleet action off Cape Engano. The Battle for Leyte Gulf therefore provides ample validation of the full range of the operational principles.

NOTES

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7. Bates, p. 16.

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2. Edwin P. Hoyt, The Battle for Leyte Gulf, The Death Knell of the Japanese Fleet (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1972), p. 3.

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